

# PRINCIPLES AND FACTS

OF

## The American Tract Society.

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THE building owned and occupied by the American Tract Society, is located at 150 Nassau-street, near the Park, New York. It was erected in 1825, the year the Society was formed, by funds contributed in New York; and rebuilt and enlarged in 1846 by a loan secured by mortgage on the premises, to be paid from proceeds of rents of parts of the building not now occupied by the Society. It is eighty feet by ninety-four, and five stories high, besides basement for storing paper, and cellar for coal. The first floor is occupied by the Society's general depository, sales-room, treasurer's office, and stores; the second furnishes rooms for the New York City Tract Society, the American Messenger, and Child's Paper, and other offices; the third contains the committee-room, executive offices, and composing-room; the fourth is the bindery, and the fifth the press-room. The printing and hydraulic presses—of which there are 26—and other machinery, are propelled, and the entire building is also heated, by steam. The central court is excavated and forms a boiler-room. The number of printers, binders, and other persons employed in the building, is not far from 300, many of whom attend a daily prayer-meeting at 12 o'clock. The daily issues of the Society exceed 50,000 publications, of which about 4,000 are books.

CATHOLIC BASIS.—This Society was formed by Christians of various denominations to publish the great evangelical truths in which they are agreed, or, in the language of the constitution, “to diffuse a knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality, by the circulation of religious publications calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians.” It is thus precluded from publications involving subjects of controversy among evangelical Christians. Nor can topics of a local or sectional character be expected in the issues of a national catholic institution. But with these constitutional limitations, there has been found a broad and inviting field from which the productions of sanctified genius have been culled; and there has been almost uninterrupted harmony among evangelical Christians of various names in receiving and diffusing the publications of the Society over the world.

Carrying out the spirit of its organization, the officers, directors, agents, and colporteurs of the Society are connected with not far from twenty different evangelical denominations: Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopal, Reformed Dutch, Methodist, Lutheran, German Reformed, Cumberland Presbyterian, Associate Reformed, and other churches. The Publishing, Distributing, and Finance Committees—together constituting the Executive Committee—consist of members of six different denominations; and their services are wholly gratuitous.

PUBLICATIONS.—A publishing Society must be tested by the character of its publications—by what is in them, rather than what is not; by those it issues, and not by those its principles exclude. The Rev. Dr. Duff of Scotland, in his anniversary speech, said “he had attempted

to analyze the Society's list of publications, but found them so varied as to excite his wonder and admiration." Nearly thirty years of self-sacrificing attention to the selection of the two thousand different publications, including four hundred different volumes, by six distinguished clergymen of as many denominations, has produced a body of as rich spiritual instruction, adapted to the varied ages, capacities, and conditions of individuals and families, as can be found in the same compass in any land or language. Children and youth find their wants admirably met in the Pictorial Tract Primer, Songs for Little Ones at Home, and hundreds of beautiful and instructive tracts and books, illustrated almost in the perfection of the printer's and engraver's art. The standard treatises of Leslie, Gregory, Chalmers, Nelson, Spring, McIlvaine, and Plumer, and others, furnish a complete arsenal of weapons for the defence of our common Christianity, and for the overthrow of infidelity. The biographical series, embracing the lives of Henry, Buchanan, Martyn, Summerfield, and Hallock, with standard female missionary memoirs, and the glowing sketch of Lady Huntington and her Friends, is believed to furnish as safe and beautiful models of Christian life as are extant. The practical works of Flavel, Baxter, Bunyan, Alleine, Hopkins, Hall, Doddridge, Edwards, Fuller, Pike, James, and a hundred others, are standard in the religious world, and will be till the end of time. The Family Bible, of which the New Testament and part of the Old are issued, with highly evangelical notes and instructions, so brief and so simple as to be read and comprehended by all, and so cheap as to be within the reach of all, with the series of biblical helps now in progress, will form an invaluable treasure-house of scriptural knowledge for innumerable households. Add to these D'Aubigné's History of the

great Reformation, and kindred illustrations of "God in history," and the range of publications suited to popular circulation in the department of practical theology would seem to be all that the friends of religious knowledge could wish; while the crowning characteristic of all is the exaltation of Christ as a complete Saviour, and the inculcation of justification by faith alone, through his atoning sacrifice, and the necessity of the renewing and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

However valuable the publications, their usefulness chiefly depends, under God, on the extent of their circulation. Hence the enterprises for diffusing them among the masses are of vital importance. Independent of the spontaneous demand for them through the channels of trade, gratuitous supplies are furnished to a large amount for distribution by Bethel, army, and navy chaplains, on board our merchant marine, by missionaries at home and abroad, and by pastors, travellers, and individual Christians. The value of publications thus distributed annually, including the grants by colporteurs among the destitute, is not far from \$50,000.

More systematic plans for cities and large towns assume the form of *tract visitation*, or the monthly visits of Christians from house to house to circulate religious tracts, accompanied by personal efforts for the spiritual benefit of the neglected classes. It is supposed that not far from 10,000 Christians, male and female, are thus engaged in doing good, and perhaps fifty tract missionaries employ their whole time in eliciting and superintending their labors, and in efforts for the poor.

**COLPORTAGE**—or the distribution of religious publications by sale or gift, with spiritual conversation and prayer—was adopted by the Society in 1841, as an effective and economical mode of evangelizing the masses.

Combining the power of the press and of personal influence in aggressive, itinerant labors, it is adapted to a wide territory and a sparse and varied population. It was introduced at a period when the spirit of emigration at home was rapidly peopling the new territories; when foreign emigration began to deluge our shores; when a cheap and vicious press was pouring forth its noxious issues, and when the inadequate supply of ministerial instruction was painfully obvious. It has demonstrated its adaptation to all parts of the country and to all classes of our population, native and foreign, Protestant, papal and infidel.

*The Western states*, where the experiment was first made, peculiarly demanded the application of such a system as Colportage. The territory of the great West is so wide, its settlement so rapid, its population so scattered and heterogeneous, its institutions so unformed, and its supply of religious instruction, either by the pulpit or the press, so incomplete, that without active and aggressive agencies reaching the household and the individual, multitudes will perish in error or indifference, without the gospel.

*The Southern and South-western states* present a wide and important field for Colporteur labors. The pine forests of the southern Atlantic states, with their scattered and impoverished population; the mountain "eoves" and valleys of the central south; the plains and swamps and bayous of the south-west, and the isolated plantations of the cotton, sugar, and rice districts of the whole region, contain millions of immortal beings, white and colored, who need the knowledge of Christ and his salvation. Multitudes are deprived of stated religious instruction and are destitute of religious reading, but are altogether accessible, and welcome the visits and publications of the col-

porteur. An average of more than 200 colporteurs have been employed annually during the past five years in this great field, with results as cheering as in any other portion of the country.

*The Northern and Eastern states* scarcely less require the labors of the Society in this department. There are seamen and fishermen on our coasts, and lumbermen in our forests, and coalmen and miners in our mountains, and workmen in our factories, and neighborhoods in all our towns, and habitations and streets in all our cities, and a sprinkling of foreign emigrants everywhere, as much needing evangelical efforts as the "squatters" on our western frontiers, or the turpentine-men in our southern forests. They are not reached by our able ministry, and rarely by the Christian activity of our numerous churches. They can and ought to be reached by colportage.

*The foreign emigrant population*, dispersed by millions over the country, with an annual accession of nearly half a million, have preëminent claims on such a charitable enterprise. Special attention has been devoted to this class. With few evangelical preachers, or books, or schools—with imperfect notions of a spiritual faith, and tens of thousands of them avowedly opposed to the gospel and all its institutions—perhaps one half of them under the power of a corrupt priesthood, yet all of them entering on the rights of citizenship, and exerting a powerful influence on our national character and institutions—where on the globe is there a population of equal numbers having a stronger claim upon our charitable regard, or more imperatively demanding the means of religious knowledge, oral and printed, and instruction in the way of life? Meanwhile, Providence is giving almost unrestricted access to Canada, and to the Mexican, Central,

and South American states, and so multiplying our relations to them, as to encourage and compel attention to their spiritual necessities. It is in view of such motives that the Society has prepared and issued a rich variety of its standard publications in foreign languages. About 70 books and 200 tracts are in the *German* tongue; 20 books and more than 100 tracts in the *French*; 13 books and 65 tracts in the *Spanish*; and other books or tracts in the Portuguese, Italian, Welsh, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, and Hungarian languages. And an average of more than 100 of the Society's colporteurs are annually employed among these interesting classes of our population. It is the purpose of the Committee to multiply these labors, with the growing demands of Providence in this direction.

*Statistical Results for a Year.*—The number of colporteurs in the Society's service has increased rapidly from year to year, until it amounted, in 1853-4, to *six hundred and nineteen*. The whole number of families visited during the year was 568,032, embracing nearly three millions of souls. With 265,500 of these families the colporteurs held religious conversation or prayer. The number of books sold was 499,776, making the total circulation of books during the year, 1,046,544; and since the formation of the Society, 9,463,374. The number of volumes gratuitously distributed in destitute families during the year, was *one hundred and thirty-six thousand seven hundred*, making the total grants of the year \$48,816 55. The number of prayer-meetings held or public meetings addressed was 12,706. The spiritual condition of the families thus visited, and the necessity for such efforts, may be inferred from the fact that 49,935 families were previously destitute of all religious books except the Bible, while 30,694 had not the Scriptures; 92,531, em-

braeing nearly half a million souls, habitually absented themselves from evangelical sanctuaries, and 54,980 were Roman-catholic households.

*Results of Colportage for Thirteen Years.*—The aggregate statistical results for thirteen years, ending March 1, 1854, are full of instruction and encouragement. They are as follows: Whole number of families visited, 3,820,101; families conversed or prayed with, 1,887,225; number of books sold, 3,900,739; number of books granted, 1,068,662; number of families found destitute of all religious books, 541,397; destitute of the Scriptures, 235,002; number of families neglecting evangelical preaching, 483,135; Roman-catholic families visited, 365,166. Yet the entire expense of the enterprise, including a million of books and millions of tracts gratuitously bestowed on destitute families, does not exceed one half the expense of the national census of 1850. What Christian heart is not constrained to invoke the blessing of God on the saving truth thus deposited in a permanent form in nearly four millions of human habitations? And who will not bid an enterprise God speed that is thus spreading religious knowledge broadest over a continent? Who will fail to remember the band of self-sacrificing men who are traversing the wastes of the land with their precious burden of everlasting truth?

**PERIODICALS.**—The “*American Messenger*,” edited by the Secretaries, aided by the ablest evangelical writers, is published monthly, containing condensed practical articles, and the most interesting facts from the correspondence of hundreds of colporteurs and missionaries. Perhaps no portion of the Society’s issues is more generally read and prized, or is better suited to promote the spiritual good of the masses of our population. In some large communities it is distributed as a monthly tract. It has obtained

a circulation of more than *two hundred thousand* copies. Terms, 25 cents single copy for one year; 6 copies for \$1; 20 copies for \$3; 40 copies for \$5. The postage, out of the state where published, prepaid at the office of delivery, is but 6 cents a year; within the state, 3 cents.

The "*Amerikanischer Botschafter*," (American Messenger in German,) is admirably adapted to the German mind, and should be placed in every household speaking that language. It has a monthly circulation of 25,000 copies, and is transmitted in considerable numbers to Germany. Terms the same as the English.

"*The Child's Paper*" is a beautifully illustrated monthly newspaper for the young, presenting moral and religious instruction in the most attractive form. It is also edited by the Secretaries, with the constant aid of one of the most accomplished writers for the young. The unprecedented circulation of about 300,000 copies in this country and in Europe, attests its universal popularity and usefulness. Terms, 10 copies to one address for a year, \$1; 50 copies, \$4 50; 100 copies, \$8.

Of the above-named periodicals, there had been issued up to 1854, a total of more than 24,000,000 copies.

The *Family Christian Almanac*, 48 pp., adapted to all parts of the United States, beautifully illustrated, is published annually, and has proved highly acceptable to the 200,000 or 300,000 families it visits each year. Price, 6 cents single; 50 cents a dozen; \$3 50 a hundred.

**FOREIGN OPERATIONS.**—The Society has shared in the great foreign missionary work for a quarter of a century, aiming to supply the wants especially of American missions, and the individuals or societies engaged in evangelical labors in Europe, with the means of publishing approved tracts and books in the various languages of the nations. The amount remitted in cash for this purpose

has been \$422,294. The number of publications approved by the Publishing Committee for circulation abroad at the Society's expense, is 2,885, including 282 volumes; and the Society and the institutions aided by it, have issued publications in *one hundred and seventeen languages and dialects.*\*

Large annual grants of publications are also made for the use of missionaries at their several stations, or for distribution among foreign residents or among the shipping at foreign ports. And the countries of Europe, especially the German states, are annually receiving thousands of publications in their several tongues from the presses of the new world. These fields of usefulness are continually extending, and will demand more and more of the attention and means of the Society and its friends.

*Results for Twenty-nine Years.*—Aggregate circulation of books, 9,463,374; of tracts, 138,764,824; of periodicals, 24,102,600; in foreign lands, estimated, 20,000,000; making a total circulation since the formation of the Society, of TWO HUNDRED AND TWELVE MILLIONS THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTY THOUSAND PUBLICATIONS. The gratui-

\* LIST OF LANGUAGES.—Seneca, Mohawk, Delaware, Ojibwa, Otoe, or Iowa, Wea, Putawatomie, Shawanoe, Kansas, Osage, Ottawa, Abernaquis, Sioux, or Dakota. Pawnee, Creek, Choctaw, Cherokee, Nez Perces, Creole, or Negro-German, Negro-English, English, Welsh, Irish, French, Low Breton, Flemish, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, German, Romanese, Lithuanian, Bohemian, Hungarian, or Magyar, Slavonian, Upper Wendish, Nether Wendish, Vandalian, Servian, Wallachian, Croatian, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Greenlandish, Esquimaux, Swedish, Polish, Judeo-Polish, Finnish, Lappish, Russ, Rival-Estonian, Dorpat-Estonian, Mongolian, Lettish, Tartar-Turkish, Thibetan, Bulgarian, Armenian, Armeno-Turkish, Hebrew, Hebrew-German, Hebrew-Spanish, Modern Greek, Greco-Turkish, Arabic, Syriac, Nestorian, Persian, Grebo, Mpongwe, Bakali, Basá, Caffer, Zula, Sessuto, Wanika, Kinika, Timneh, Mahratta, Goojuratee, Latin, Tamul, Cingalese, Teloogoo, Oriya, Bengali, Canarese, Malayalim, Tulu, Hindui, or Dev Nagare, Hindooostani, or Urdu, Panjabi, or Gurmukhi, Cashmire, Burman, Peguan, Salong, Sgau Karen, Sho Karen, Kemmee, Siamese, Asamene, Tai, or Khamti, Singpho, Nága, Chinese, Japanese, Malay, Bugis, Javanese, Lettinese, Dyak, Hawaiian, Marquesas, Feejee. Total, 117.

tous issues for the same period have been 682,933,000 pages, amounting to \$415,000. Total receipts for sales, \$2,515,505 18; and in donations and legacies, \$1,708,-686 52. Total expenditures, including \$615,794 74 for colportage, \$422,294 for foreign distribution, and \$3,186,102 96 chiefly for manufacturing publications, \$4,223,191 70, being the whole amount received.

PROVIDENTIAL CLAIMS AND RELATIONS OF THE SOCIETY.—The ever-growing necessity for a *Christian literature* among the most enterprising and intelligent people on the globe, stimulated by a universal system of popular education, the working of free institutions, and the influence of an able pulpit and a free press, demand the unceasing activity of such a Society as this. Publications must be selected or prepared of a character suited to the people. Native authorship must be judiciously encouraged; and the new and the old in scriptural writings must be wisely balanced, so as to secure solidity with vivacity. What the masses need, rather than what they crave—what will benefit and save, rather than what will sell and please, must still be the guiding rule and motive. Great grace and wisdom are needed for this ever-recurring, never-finished work.

Its relations to the press impose on this Society an ever-watchful regard to the *vicious and corrupting publications* with which the public morals are poisoned, and souls are ruined. By its periodicals, colporteurs, and other legitimate means, it has done something to dry up those fountains of pollution; and by preoccupying the mind, and competing in cheapness and attractiveness with a fictitious and immoral literature, it may do yet more to stay this source of wide-spread evil.

By the employment of hundreds of pious laymen, in coöperation with the ministry, in evangelical labors, and

by affording fields of usefulness for thousands in the streets and lanes of our cities, the Society is affording a demonstration on a wide scale of the *efficiency of Christian effort* in other spheres than the sacred ministry, and is thus contributing to the needful development of the piety of Christians in personal toils for the evangelization of the world.

It is also furnishing an illustration of the feasibility and beauty of *united feeling and action* among the followers of a common Saviour. All its tendencies are to *union*. All its influences are cementing. While it leaves to all denominations and parties the advocacy of their several peculiarities, it aims to give universal ascendancy to those great cardinal evangelical principles in which all good men are essentially agreed ; and thus it throws back the boast of the papist and the cavil of the infidel, by the embodiment of a real, vital unity in the Protestant faith, and by demonstrating the truth of the evangelic scheme in the universal suffrage of the people of God to its essential principles.

The demands of Providence for aggressive efforts in the diffusion of the knowledge of Christ, are only limited by the field, which is “the world,” and by the available resources of men and means for prosecuting the enterprise. Our own country has preëminent claims. Its position among the nations ; its boundless resources ; the vastness of its territory and the dispersion of its inhabitants ; its prospective greatness ; the heterogeneous character of its population ; the prevalence of error and superstition ; the alarming destitution of moral and religious instruction, all add to the importance of the work of such an institution as this, and give pressure to the motives for the effective and universal employment of its energies. The countries bordering on the United States, mostly sunk

in papal error, but now waking to a new life, are beginning to urge their claims for a purer, better faith, in the literature which has nourished our Christianity and given strength to our institutions. And the old world, convulsed and agitated by the struggles of its mightiest nations, is coming to feel something of its need of a spiritual religion, and as much demands our intervention through appropriate channels, as though that need were universally recognized. Meanwhile the heathen empires, some of them crumbling under the weight of their superstitions and the silent working of Christian principles, make their mute appeal for constant and increasing benefactions, that the word of life may have free course and be glorified. So far as in us lies, and the people of God shall afford the ability, these varied and world-wide claims for gospel light will be met, and generously responded to. Every qualified candidate for the colporteur service must be sent forth. Every suitable application for publications to be gratuitously distributed among the poor, must be supplied. Every Christian disciple in papal lands, and every organization in the old world, desiring aid in opposing error and spreading God's truth, must have it. No missionary of the cross toiling amid the wide howling waste of heathenism, and appealing for means to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ to benighted idolaters, must be denied, so long as American charity fails not, and divine Providence shall bless the means for evoking that benevolence.

**CLAIMS OF THE SOCIETY ON ITS PATRONS AND FRIENDS.—**  
Having given this condensed exposition of the principles, facts, and relations of the Society, we would respectfully submit the following suggestions as to the coöperation desired from its patrons and friends.

1. *Use its publications as a means of instruction and*

edification; and as helps to usefulness, by selling, loaning, or giving them to those who might not otherwise possess them. Subscribers can readily be procured for the Messenger or Child's Paper, or these papers may be subscribed for by benevolent individuals for gratuitous distribution. By becoming *voluntary colporteurs* among the poor around you, an important service may be rendered to Christ's kingdom.

2. *Encourage its Colporteurs.* They are believed to be men of prayer and self-denial. Their work is a hard one. Cheer them in it by words of Christian affection, and acts of Christian hospitality. Help them by your advice and prayers. And if one should be slothful or unfaithful, do the Society the kind office to inform the Committee.

3. *Contribute to its funds.* Its entire benevolent operations in this and other lands are dependent directly on the freewill-offerings of good men. It has no vested funds, and seeks none. It would continue to rely on God, and on Christian confidence and liberality. A few General Agents are employed to visit the churches, secure colporteurs, and raise funds; but not one in twenty of the churches friendly to the Society is thus reached, and the main dependence of the Society must be on the voluntary action of pastors and people in providing the means for keeping this vast machinery of benevolence in motion.

*Will not each Pastor who receives this pamphlet preach one sermon annually to his people for this object, and secure and remit their contributions?*

And has not each Christian reader a personal responsibility in this matter? Is it not as much and as clearly his work as ours, if it be, as we believe, the *Lord's work*? As a steward of God, do you not recognize, and will you

not adopt the *scriptural system* of benevolent action, and determine what portion of present means, and what proportion of future income you will devote to this and other benevolent causes; and then at *stated periods*—weekly, quarterly, or annually—solemnly set it apart for Christ and his kingdom? This rule will regulate all charitable action by principle, and will bring satisfaction and peace with all the gains of worldly business, while it will replenish the Lord's treasury in every department of religious charity. Hundreds, if not thousands of good men are now acting on this divine rule of beneficence, and rejoice in its blessings.

A pleasant method of coöperating in this work, is by the payment of the usual salary of a colporteur, \$150, as many individuals do permanently; or by the organization of a colporteur association, male or female, and raising that amount annually. Such individuals or associations may receive the correspondence of a colporteur quarterly. Others constitute themselves and their children and friends *life members* by paying \$20, or *life directors* by \$50. *Remittances by mail are speedy and safe.*

4. *Pray for its prosperity and usefulness.* What more proper object of prayer? Five hundred or six hundred godly men are daily and hourly in contact with immortal souls, conversing with them as to eternal things, and depositing thousands of saving publications in their hands. Ten thousand Christians are going their monthly rounds in the abodes of vice and poverty, to warn the impenitent, instruct the erring, and comfort the desponding. Two hundred millions of this Society's books and tracts are scattered over the world, and many millions of them remain in the habitations of the people speaking a hundred languages; the Spirit of God can make any one of them and all of them the means of salvation, in answer

to prayer. Pray, then, O pray for the baptism of the Holy One on all the enterprises, publications, and laborers of "*the highway and hedge Society.*"

In these and kindred ways may every American and every Christian aid in making known the unsearchable riches of Christ to perishing men throughout the world. And does not every motive of patriotism, piety, and benevolence impel to the cordial, liberal support of instrumentalities for the evangelization of the people of the existing generation? Are our civil institutions secure, with the prevalence of ignorance and error and the elements of all evil in the midst of us? Shall public morals and private virtue be left to the desolating influence of a vicious and unprincipled press? Shall the tide of emigration roll upon our shores with no healing for its bitter waters? Shall Rome establish its empire here, with no increase of efforts to counteract its plottings and to enlighten and save its adherents? Shall millions of our countrymen live and die without the blessings of a sanctified press, in a Christian land, and in a printing and reading age? Or shall not the well-being of our country, the precious interests of civil and religious freedom throughout the world, compassion for the perishing, and above all, the love of Christ and the glory of the Redeemer, constrain to unwonted effort and sacrifice for the advancement of this and every enterprise for the evangelization and salvation of America and the world?

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#### FORM OF A BEQUEST.

I give and bequeath to "THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY," instituted in the city of New York, the sum of — dollars, to be applied to the charitable uses and purposes of said Society.

For bequests designed for the Society at Boston, the same form may be used, substituting the word Boston for New York.